

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:15 p.m. at the Sacramento Capital Club. In his remarks, he referred to luncheon organizer Eleni Tsakapoulous and her parents, Angelo and Sophia; Mayor Joseph Serna, Jr., of Sacramento; Phil Angeles, candidate for State treasurer; and Dan Dutko, chair, Victory Fund.

### **Remarks at a Rock the Vote Reception in Beverly Hills, California**

*November 16, 1997*

Thank you very much. I love Rock the Vote. [*Laughter*] I liked it the first time I heard about it. I pledged to support the motor voter bill when I ran for President in 1992, and I was thrilled when it passed. And we had a great signing ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House, a real tribute to the efforts of all those who started Rock the Vote and were so involved in it.

And I want to thank Dan for those fine remarks. I want to thank Dan and Jenna and Jeff and Hilary and my great friend Ricki Seidman, for all the work they've done for Rock the Vote over the years. Good luck, Donna. You gave a good speech up here; that's a good start.

Let me say that—oh, I also want to thank Wolfgang and Barbara for having us here at this wonderful place. We should probably be sitting down and eating instead of standing up and talking, but I'm delighted to be here.

Let me say to all of you, when I ran for President, I did so out of an urge, a compassion, almost a compulsion to try to change this country, to give it back to the people and to make it work again, to basically reclaim the future for your generation and for the young children who are here. And I've tried to continue to always think every day about how whatever I do will affect not just the moment, not just a month or a year from now, but what will be the impact 10 or 20 or 30 years from now.

Most of what we do today will become only clear in its impact when I'm long out of the White House. Part of that is a function of the time in which we're living when things are changing so dramatically. But I've tried to stay in touch with young people and their concerns throughout my Presidency. As a

matter of fact, the last meeting I had before I left for the west coast, at the White House, was one of my regular roundtables. We don't call them coffees anymore—[*laughter*—although we can—now I insist that we have a reporter in every one; I wish we'd had one in all the others—but anyway, with a lot of young people. And these young people came, and they talked to me about a number of different things. And then a young man who used to work for me—now works for MTV—reported on a survey that had been done by MTV about the attitudes of young people and how basically optimistic they were about their prospects and how well things were going in the country. And they had some concerns, and they were the ones you would expect.

But there was one sort of dark spot in this survey I want to bring up, because it seems to me to undercut everything that Rock the Vote stands for, and I say it to throw it down as a challenge tonight and to thank the people who have organized this event and to thank all of you who have come here. Basically, young people were upbeat about the country, skeptical about the political system, skeptical about whether it was really working for them, skeptical about whether they could make a difference. And what I would like to say to you is, no serious student of the last 5 years could possibly believe that. Therefore, we have a lot of work to do if you expect your generation to completely fulfill its promise and if you expect to have this democracy work for you.

Just consider where we started in '92. I said that I wanted to be President because I wanted to reverse trickle-down economics; it wasn't working for America. I wanted to go to a strategy I called invest-and-grow. I said that I wanted to replace welfare dependency with a system that emphasized work and childrearing. I said that I wanted to change our crime policies away from hot air and tough talk toward a strategy based on police, prevention, and punishment. I said that I wanted to try to find a way so that we could support families both in raising their children and in succeeding at work, because nearly every family I know, even upper income people, find conflicts repeatedly between their

obligations they feel to their children and the obligations they feel at work.

I said that we ought to have a world-class education system for all Americans; we ought to reform health care to expand coverage and quality, to control costs. I said that we had to do more for poor people in isolated communities in our urban and rural areas. I said that I thought we had to build one America out of all of our diversity, across the racial and religious, the gender, the sexual orientation, even the political divides. We had to find some way to define ourselves by what we had in common, because we were growing ever more diverse, and if we didn't find a way to do that, then our efforts would be undermined. And finally, I said, I thought it was terribly important that America not withdraw from the world at the end of the cold war. We had to continue to push for the world to enjoy more peace and prosperity and freedom.

Now, some people said, including me on occasion, that that was a new Democratic approach. For me, it was our oldest ideals with new ideas for a new era. But you be the judge. Is it different now than it was 5 years ago? We have the best economy in a generation. We have the lowest crime rate in 24 years. We have the biggest drop in welfare rolls in history. We have cleaner air, cleaner water, fewer toxic waste dumps, and safer food. All of that has happened, and it is directly related to the work the American people have done, most of all, but also to the changed direction of this country in the last 5 years. And it happened because people participated in the political process and it got a result they were seeking and the result changed the lives and the framework within which we live in America. That is terribly important.

We have the family leave law. We have the law that says you can't lose your health insurance if you change jobs or somebody in your family gets sick. We're about to cover 5 million more children in poor working families who don't have health insurance today. We passed tax credits to open the doors of college to all Americans and to give families credits for their kids and credits when they adopt children who need homes. This has

made a difference. And I believe we're moving closer to one America.

In 1994, we had an election, and the Republicans won the majority in Congress, and they had a contract on America and that election had consequences, too. We know it was a very low turnout election, and we know that more than anything else, it was younger voters and single women workers who stayed home. And I spent a year contrasting my vision of America with theirs and telling them that if we could work together for positive change, but that I was determined to beat back a vision of this country that said that Government is always the problem, there were no responsibilities we had in common, and who cares if we became more unequal and more unfair. And I'm proud that we defeated that vision. And that, too, had consequences as a direct result of the electoral process, and I think you have to acknowledge that.

Now, more importantly, there are a lot of things to do. Can we grow the economy and clean up the environment? Can we meet America's responsibilities to avoid global warming and reduce greenhouse gas emissions? I think we can. How are we going to continue to create this vision of one America? We still have problems. A distinguished Chinese-American who grew up in New York City can't get voted out of the Senate Judiciary Committee because he believes in what his President believes in on affirmative action, even though he has promised to faithfully enforce the law, whatever it is—in the Civil Rights Division. Bill Lee ought to be confirmed. That is wrong. That is wrong.

But how did it happen? A whole bunch of people voted and a whole bunch of other people stayed home and certain people got elected. There are consequences to active citizenship and consequences to sitting on the sidelines. That's why I love Rock the Vote. Yes, it's been fun. Yes, the events are exuberant. Yes, they feature young people. But I think the work of citizenship can be fun, too.

We have 800 colleges, tens of thousands of young college students going all across America today, every week, going into inner-city schools to teach children to read, to give them a chance because that was one of the

things that I promised in the campaign of '96, and that's one of the things that we started since then in 1997. These efforts have consequences. Citizens matter.

And I just want you to think about that. Whatever the headlines in the daily paper are—"The President is Trying to Contain the Spread of Biological and Chemical Weapons Today"—a very important issue—whatever the consequences are, remember, in a democracy the people making the decisions were elected by people who voted and by people who stayed home. That's why Rock the Vote is important. Remember, almost everybody in this room has a lot more future ahead of you than I do. Most of what we're doing, you will live with the consequences of; you will reap the benefits of; you will bear the burdens of.

And this country is in good shape today, in no small measure, because our Constitution has permitted us to recreate America based on our oldest values in every new time of challenge and change. That's what we're doing now. You should be glad you're alive now. If we do it right, the next 50 years will be the most exciting and yet peaceful time in all human history if we do it right. But it requires that people neither be lackadaisical or cynical.

If you believe, as I do, that every person can make a difference and that every person is obliged to make a difference, then it necessarily follows that anyone who doesn't try is shirking his or her duty as a citizen. That's really what Rock the Vote is all about.

I'll just close with—I had an interesting meeting at the White House with Senator Dole after that election. And we were sitting around, relaxing, talking like old friends, forgetting about all the things that were said that probably shouldn't have been. [Laughter] And I said, "You know, you've been in Washington a lot longer than I have." He said, "That's what I tried to convince the voters of at the election." [Laughter] And I said, "Now, do you think that public life is more honest or less honest today than it was 30 years ago or 35 years ago." He said, "It's not even close, not even remotely close. It is much, much more honest today than 30 or 35 years ago."

Now, if young Americans don't believe that, if they don't believe that their vote makes a difference, and if they don't believe there are consequences to what they do after the titanic struggles of the last 2 years, we have, all of us who believe that, have somehow failed in our responsibilities as citizens, and we have to redouble our effort to do better. That's why I always try to do a lot of town meetings. That's why I've insisted in the two Presidential elections that we have one debate each election that involved ordinary citizens who could ask the candidates directly what their concerns are.

But we have to do more. There is more for Rock the Vote to do. There is more to do to involve ordinary citizens. We have now tried for 5 years in a row, so far unsuccessfully, to reform the campaign finance laws. But I will remind you, we have not only to control the cost of campaigns, we have to increase the access of the people to the candidates through free or reduced air time so that we can have more positive, constructive interactions so that people will get excited by the debates at election and participate.

But whether that happens or not, no one has an excuse to sit on the sidelines. You have only to look at the differences in America now compared to 5 years ago to say, yes, it makes a difference. Yes, we made a difference in Rock the Vote. Yes, motor voter made a difference. Yes, every time we tell young people they have to take some time to be good citizens, it make a difference.

I will always try to be here for Rock the Vote, even when I am in a rocking chair and out of office. [Laughter] But I want you to remember that. And those of us who have done well in this country and in our lives have a special responsibility to reach out to try to help those who have not done so well and to tell them that at election time their vote counts just as much as ours and can make the kind of America we want to leave to our children.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:30 p.m. at Spago's Restaurant. In his remarks, he referred to the following Rock the Vote officials: Dan Adler, chairperson and reception host, and his wife, Jenna; Jeff Ayeroff, founder; Hilary Rosen, board member; Ricki Seidman, former executive director;

and Donna Frisbee, acting executive director. He also referred to Wolfgang and Barbara Puck, owners of the restaurant.

**Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Los Angeles, California**

*November 16, 1997*

Well, thank you—*chaver*. [Laughter] Actually, I learned how to do that—you know, that's just the way we say it in Arkansas. What can I say? [Laughter] Walk into any redneck bar on the weekend—[laughter]—that's the way we talk.

Thank you, Haim. Thank you, Cheryl. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for being here. I'm, first of all, delighted to see you all, and I want to thank you for your presence here and for your support. And I want to thank you for having us in your beautiful home and your beautiful tent. [Laughter] I used to say, when I was on the stump running for President, I wanted to create a big tent in America that we could keep everybody in. I think we've almost achieved it tonight. [Laughter]

You mentioned Yitzhak Rabin, who was my great friend, and we sadly observed the second anniversary of his death just a few days ago. And I've only been through this twice—two anniversaries of his death that I have observed—both times I remember exactly where I was and exactly what I was doing when I heard that he had been shot. And I remember exactly what I did waiting for the news of whether he lived or not. So I've thought a lot about what it was to me that made him so special, because we had a relationship that was one of the most important things that ever happened to me in my life. The thing I liked about Rabin was that he was tough as nails, but he had a great heart and a great imagination. And he understood that the status quo would not work for Israel, and therefore he was prepared to make changes, even though they carried risks.

In a less dire way entirely, that is the general choice that has faced America for the last few years, because when things begin to change in a society, if you want to hold on to your basic values—you can't hold on to

your basic values by holding on to old conditions. In order to hold on to your basic values, you have to change conditions; you have to change your approach; you have to be open to new things and even open to taking risks.

Six years ago, when I decided to run for President, I did it basically because I thought that we were not changing fast enough and that we didn't have a strategy about how we were going to get into the 21st century. We were talking about the revolution in telecommunications and software and other things around the table tonight—they are really metaphors for the breathtaking changes that are going on in the way Americans work and live and relate to the rest of the world. And if we want to preserve what is best about America, therefore, we have to be the most aggressive change agents in the world. That is the premise on which I began to seek the Presidency 6 years ago.

I thought the only way to restore opportunity and responsibility and a sense of community in this country was to basically have new ideas that were relevant to a new time. And so we set about doing that. And the people of California were kind enough to vote for Vice President Gore and me and to give us a chance to serve, and we changed the economic policy of the country. We went from trickle-down economics to invest-and-grow economics. We changed the National Government's approach to crime and focused on police, prevention, as well as punishment. We changed our approach to welfare and focused on requiring work but also supporting children. We aggressively embraced the environmental policy designed to facilitate economic growth by improving the environment.

And we did a lot of other things. We tried to take on what I think is a central challenge for almost every family in America today, even quite well-to-do families, even though it's tougher for poor families, and that is, nearly every person I know with young children can cite at least one example where they have felt a conflict between their obligations at work and their obligations to their children. And our society is not sufficiently organized to enable people to succeed at work and at what is everybody's most important job, which is raising good children. It is still